

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9514

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 8554

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, PINS, IN

SUBJ: IMPLICATIONS FOR LABOR OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY:
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

1. ALTHOUGH TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS CONTROLLED BY NON-CPI OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE STRONGHOLDS IN RAILWAYS, MANUFACTURING, BANKING, COMMERCE AND STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, WE DOUBT THAT THEY WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN CALLING PROTEST STRIKES. IN GENERAL WORKERS AND THEIR UNIONS, REGARDLESS OF POLITICAL COLORATION, WILL PROBABLY BE RELUCTANT TO ENGAGE IN AGITATIONAL ACTIVITY EVEN WHERE ONLY ECONOMIC ISSUES ARE INVOLVED. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE ONLY AN UNCONFIRMED REPORT OF THE ARREST OF GEORGE FERNANDES (PRESIDENT OF THE ALL INDIA RAILWAYMEN'S FEDERATION) AND NO OTHER UNION LEADERS, THREAT OF ARREST CAN BE EXPECTED TO INHIBIT THEM.

2. THERE ARE OFFICIAL EXPRESSIONS OF APPROBATION FOR MRS. GANDHI'S ACTIONS AT THE CONGRESS-R-ALIGNED INTUC NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS, ALTHOUGH PRIVATELY VOICES OF REGRET ARE HEARD. THE INDEPENDENT HMS, SPLIT MAINLY BETWEEN CONGRESS-R AND SOCIALIST PARTY SUPPORTERS, IS EXPECTED TO REMAIN SILENT, ALTHOUGH LOCAL AND STATE OFFICIALS MAY NOT. ACCORDING TO A GOI RADIO BROADCAST, THE HMS JOINED WITH THE HMP (SOCIALIST PARTY) AND THE CITU (CPM) IN A
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 08554 301752Z

GENERAL STRIKE IN BOMBAY JUNE 27, WHICH ALLEGEDLY FIZZLED.

3. CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS POSE A POTENTIAL PROBLEM FOR INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATIONS WITH OFFICES HERE, I.E., THE INTERNATIONAL METAL WORKERS FEDERATION (IMF) AND THE ICFTU. IF THE RIGHT OF ASSOCIATION IS SIGNIFICANTLY RESTRICTED, FOR EXAMPLE BY ARRESTING TRADE UNIONISTS, THESE ORGANIZATIONS MAY FEEL OBLIGED TO CONDEMN THE GOI. THE IMF REPRESENTATIVE IN INDIA NOTED THAT HIS ORGANIZATION HAD CONDEMNED THE MOVE TOWARD A SINGLE PARTY STATE IN BANGLADESH AND EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT INDIA WAS FOLLOWING THAT ROUTE.

4. WHILE A SENIOR LEVEL CONTACT IN THE LABOR MINISTRY WAS UNWILLING TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE STATE OF EMERGENCY COULD HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN INDIA, A NON-GOVERNMENTAL SOURCE WHO IS CLOSE TO THE LABOR MINISTER INDICATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD USE ITS EMERGENCY POWERS TO RESTRUCTURE THE PRESENT LABOR MANAGEMENT SYSTEM. THE GOI HAS LONG CRITICIZED "ECONOMISM" (BREAD AND BUTTER UNIONISM) AND OUR SOURCE SUGGESTED THAT THIS COULD BE CHANGED TO EMPHASIZE PRODUCTIVITY.
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